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DNA Synthesizer Says Fear Of Unknown Hurts Research

Dr. Arthur Kornberg, winner of the 1959 Nobel Prize for his laboratory synthesis of the building blocks of life, warned yesterday that fear of the unknown is hampering research on projects which could save thousands of human lives.

Dr. Kornberg, who created viral DNA in a test tube, said President Nixon's recent decision to freeze the level of government funds for scientific research was "disappointing" and a manifestation of this fear.

He pointed to the discrepancy between the amount of money spent on the moon landing and that spent for basic medical and biochemical research.

Scientists have long hoped that "genetic engineering"—the introduction of healthy genes into a defective or diseased body—would result from the study of DNA, the essence of life.

Dr. Kornberg said his latest research with the enzyme polymerase, which is the catalyst for the replication of DNA, might give a clue to how it could be done.

Test-tube experiments have shown that this enzyme can correct certain mutated DNA structures, he said.

DNA structures mutated by ultra-violet rays had their incorrect portions chemically excised by the enzyme and the perfect combination restored. This, he noted, could have broad implications for combatting genetically induced diseases and defects and in healing lesions.

Dr. Kornberg, of Stanford University's biochemistry department, was in Baltimore last night to speak at meeting sponsored by the Baltimore Committee for the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel.

Dr. Kornberg said he had been impressed with the far-ranging work of the Weizmann Institute, including work on genetics and DNA.

"International Flavor"

Regretting the lack of Arab participation in the international institute, Dr. Kornberg pointed to political rivalry as another major hindrance of scientific advancement.

The space race with Russia to the moon was yet another example of this deleterious chauvinism, he said.

"Science has an international flavor . . . It doesn't require the identity of nation," Dr. Kornberg said.